

AMINATA TOURÉ

President of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council of Senegal, former Prime Minister of Senegal

Thank you very much, Thierry. I would like to congratulate you for this conference, which kept all its promises. I am the President of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council, which plays an advisory role to the Government and the Parliament. I would like to talk about Senegal and give a little background. It is a small country. We like to call it the entry to Africa, when you come from the US; we are just facing New York, which was bad luck, as it was one of the biggest slave ports. We are 16 million, so a small population, but we are mostly known for our political stability. We are a country which is 97% Muslim, and our first President, in 1960, happened to be a Christian; he was the father of independence. He was supported at that time by all the religious leaders. His opponent, who was a Muslim, was a lawyer going by the name of Lamine-Guèye. I would like to show with this that we have been nurturing internal cohesion and inter-religious relationships quite peacefully.

Therefore, we are an Islamic country of tolerance and peace, and it translated into stability. We are very proud of that, and we would like to nurture and sustain it. That is the first thing I would like to say about Senegal.

Secondly, about the democracy, we have changed presidents peacefully over time. The first one, Léopold Sédar Senghor, happened to be a member of l'Académie Française. He spoke French so well that he was appointed, which shows the historical relationship with France. He resigned from power in 1981. His successor, President Abdou Diouf, left power in 2000 after democratic elections, succeeded by President Abdoulaye Wade, who was himself defeated in 2012 by the sitting President, Macky Sall, all of that in a peaceful process. Therefore, we think that we have a strong democracy that is engrained in the political culture, and we work to sustain that, because it is never a given; we all have to work with it.

The next thing I would like to say about Senegal is that we have what we call a republican army, which means we have an army that follows the rules of democracy, that respects the constitution, and we know nothing of *coups d'état* in Senegal. That defeats all the stereotypes that are held about Africa. The army stays in its role; it is very much involved in peacekeeping operations all over the world, and as we speak also in Mali. It also worked in Gambia, in the neighbouring country of Gambia, and the army is very professional and stands by the constitution. We also have a very strong press, some would say too strong. Liberty of the press is a given, with journalists expressing themselves in a free way.

These are the ingredients of Senegalese stability. When it comes to the economy, because, of course, if you want to sustain that you have to create wealth, we are a very young country. 70% of the population is below the age of 40, which triggers strong challenges, the most important one being related to youth employment. When President Macky Sall became head of state, I started with him as Minister of Justice. The next year he started on a plan called *Sénégal Émergent* – we have one of the key actors here, Moubarack Lô, I would like to acknowledge him - which ranges from 2013 all the way to 2035. What the length of the plan shows is that, if you can count on a solid democracy that is engrained in the political culture, you do not only think about yourself, as we have a two-term system; you can also think about the future generations, ensuring that democracy will proceed normally, and that whoever will hold the Presidency will follow the accumulated success, because that is how it is seen.

The plan, which is about how to make Senegal emerge as a developed country, has three pillars. The first is the economy; it is very important to create wealth for the youth and for women. It has been quite successful, because last year we enjoyed 6.5% growth, so whatever we were doing seems to be working. We are below the African average of economic growth, which is between 4% and 4.1%, and we enjoy 6.5%, so it is working. How did such growth happen? First of all, it is around good governance, making sure that revenue is well spent, and it has been spent in a sector that employs most Senegalese workers, which is agriculture. The idea was to modernize agriculture, so a lot of investment



was made in modernizing equipment, moving from traditional to more modern, mechanical agriculture, and the result was that for example in peanuts, one of our biggest products, we doubled production in six years, which contributed to growth.

Regarding infrastructure, there has been immense investment to close the gap between urban and rural areas, because that is also one of the challenges we have had. When the colonisers came, they focused on the cities, because that was where they used to live and how they organised the economy, so there was a huge gap, for the most part, between rural and urban. When you come to African cities, you can enjoy a comfortable lifestyle, but drive maybe 10 km further, you are in rural Africa and you can see the gap. Therefore, President Sall was very keen on bridging the gap, and he came up with what he called a catch-up plan by investing in roads and access to water; by the way, Senegal will achieve universal access to water, and we are hopeful that in four years we will even achieve universal access to electricity. All of that, put together, triggered more production, and that is what explains this growth.

He also, of course, invested in fisheries, because we are a fishing country. We have 800 km of coast, and I will talk about the challenges related to the environment. He also subsidized production, trying also to modernise fishing equipment and small boats, which also increased production in that sector.

The second pillar is about human development. If you have an economy, you have resources. Senegal will be an oil and gas producing country – we are very happy about that – and I would also like to point out that the gas was discovered at the border between Mauretania and Senegal, on the high seas. Where is the well? It could have been more on the Mauritanian side or on the Mauretania-Senegal side, so former President Aziz and President Sall, who have to be praised for this, sat down and agreed that it had to be 50-50. We did not talk about this, but it is a very positive way of solving issues in Africa. We know that a lot of war and turmoil arise in this kind of situation, where everybody wants to take advantage, but they decided it was to be 50-50, so this was a good lesson and a good case study to publish.

Therefore, human capital was very strong on that. President Macky Sall came up with creating universities, but also investing in quality education at primary and secondary level, because we also have huge gaps in terms of education, but we have made a lot of progress. This year, for instance, more female than male students were sitting examinations to go to secondary school; that is a huge advance in a 96% Muslim country, where women are more present in education at primary level than secondary, but of course there are some social challenges, and you find fewer women in the universities. However, this is a nice trend that is being built on, so that is also being supported.

Regarding human capital, there is also an initiative – we have what we call *la délégation à l'entrepreneuriat rapide*: I would translate it in sort of a financial window to support specially women and youth in terms of supporting entrepreneurship and supporting small projects and small enterprises. A huge amount of money has been put into that strategy. That is the second pillar, how the country will build quality human resources, including women and young people, to support the economic plan. Most of the time there is a gap; there are opportunities in mining, in gas, etc., but on the other hand, you would not see quality human resources being well managed, so that is also part of the plan.

The third pillar is equally important, which is good governance, and Senegal has been recognized as one of the good countries, trying to really promote good governance. We were recognised by the Mo Ibrahim Index, so we have made huge progress. We still have challenges, of course, but that is one of the priorities of President Macky Sall and his government. There is also cooperation in this third pillar, of course, and at different levels, including at sub-regional level, with the Economic Commission for West African Countries (ECOWAS). We are very interrelated; we have a common market, a common currency, the CFA, which we inherited from our ancient relationship with France. There is a debate within the country as to whether we should start reflecting on our own currency, but that is ongoing, and we are also doing that with our partners.

We have the African market, meaning what happened recently, the African Trade Zone, which will present Africa as being the biggest common market. We have not spoken a lot about it, but it will be one of the biggest common markets. The heads of state have agreed on it, and it is an opportunity to trade with ourselves, because this is also one of the challenges in Africa – we do not trade much between ourselves. Intra-African trading is less than 10%, although



if you go to Asia or even to Europe, it might be up to 70%, so with this common trade zone, we should be moving forward.

I have to talk about the challenges, of course. One of these is youth employment. We have a gap in terms of industrialization, and that is one of the priorities for President Macky Sall's second term. How will we import less in terms of goods and instead manufacture them here in Senegal? Ethiopia is doing a good job, and that is what we would also like to do.

The second is the environment. I mentioned the 800 km of coast, and we are seeing encroachment of the sea on the land, which is also a challenge we are trying to face. There is also security, not within Senegal but as a sub-regional concern. We know the situation of Nigeria and Mali in terms of terrorism, and it is coming closer and closer to Senegal. We are also an actor, because we are supporting our Malian friends, but that is also a concern that we have to list among the challenges.

What is the way forward? The way forward is to build upon our experience, building stronger institutions, and when it comes to the political process in Senegal, it is already well engrained, as good governance is a given, with youth at the centre of whatever we are doing. I said that they are 70% of our citizens, and whatever policies are being developed have to be youth-centred and women-centred. Taking both groups, they are 70% of the population.

We also, in a place like this, have to talk about cooperation. How will we develop stronger links with our traditional friends? I talked about the very ancient relationship with France, but there is also ECOWAS and how we will create a common view on this issue, on a win-win basis, of course. There has been a history and there will be a vision of our relationship, and of course, we need to open up to Africa and to the rest of the world.

Thierry de Montbrial

Thank you very much, Aminata; it was fascinating.